TL1430-10

Text of a Petition to the UN Committee of 24
submitted by Lord Avebury
on behalf of the
Parliamentary Mission to Lisbon, June 1988

Mr Chairman and Distinguished Members of the Committee of 24,

From 25 to 28 June this year, Parliamentarians from three continents, Mr Satsuki Eda, Member of the Japanese Diet, Mr Tony Lamb, Member of the House of Representatives of Australia, and myself, member of the House of Lords, visited Lisbon in order to conduct consultations on the question of East Timor with members of the Portuguese Government and Parliament, with the East Timorese community in Portugal and with leaders of the two East Timorese political parties, Fretilin and UDT which have, since 1986, been joined in a National Convergence.

This initiative was a follow-up of previous international initiatives taken by Parliamentarians on behalf of East Timor and led us to launch a new organisation, Parliamentarians for East Timor, in order to coordinate and promote activities in support of a just solution to the problem of East Timor in as many countries as possible. We decided that the new organisation would base its actions on the Declaration on Behalf of East Timor of June 1985, which won the support of more than 450 Parliamentarians from around the world.

Although that Declaration is now more than three years old, its central statement is as valid today as it was then:

"We affirm that negotiations [as called for under U.N. General Assembly Resolution 37/30] will not lead to a just settlement unless they:

1. Involve representatives of the East Timorese people including those who resist the present occupation;

2. Secure an end to hostilities which prevent the people of East Timor and their representatives from contributing freely to negotiations leading to self-determination.

3. Provide internationally acceptable conditions of access to relief and development agencies and to independent visitors, journalists and diplomats; and

4. Include an act of self-determination, which is free from interference and verified by international observers acceptable to the East Timorese

people.

Mr Chairman,

We visited Lisbon at a time when a number of constructive developments were taking place, leading us to believe that the conditions for a peaceful and just solution to East Timor's just demand for self-determination are now more favourable than they have been for many years.

First, there is the global easing of tensions, with progress being made towards the resolution of conflicts in Afghanistan, in Angola, and even in the Horn of Africa where, after a quarter of a century of armed struggle, the people of Eritrea may at last attain their independence. The United Nations is at last able to fulfil its conflict-solving role and can take credit in particular for the efforts now under way to bring the war in the Gulf to an end. This encourages us to hope that the Secretary General will take positive steps towards bringing an end to the conflict in East Timor as well.

But at the same time, we have the irony of a development where Indonesia, the widely condemned aggressor against East Timor, is seeking to bring together the two sides in the Kampuchean conflict, in order to bring to an end that country's occupation by Vietnamese troops. Is the Indonesian government hoping that, in the process, the world community will forget that its own armed forces are in illegal occupation of East Timor? The years of war, the devastating aerial bombardment by the Indonesian armed forces during the late 1970s, the massacres and atrocities perpetrated over the past 12 years, have brought death to some two hundred thousand East Timorese, nearly one-third of the pre-invasion population. Kampuchea's bitter experiences under Pol Pot have been gruesomely described as the killing fields, a description no less applicable to East Timor.

The question of East Timor's right to self-determination has been on the UN agenda now for nearly thirteen years. We should never forget that in December 1975, the UN General Assembly "strongly deplored" the Indonesian invasion and called on Indonesia

> "to desist from further violations of the territorial integrity of Portuguese Timor and to withdraw without delay its armed forces from the territory in order to enable the people of the territory freely to exercise their right to self determination".

The grounds for that condemnation of Indonesian aggression are as valid today as they were then. Now that a number of conflicts are on the way to being solved, thanks largely to the efforts of the UN Secretary General, his authority has been greatly enhanced. We therefore urge the Decolonisation Committee to impress upon the Secretary General the necessity, now, to take

some new initiative to ensure that the profoundly important principles laid down in UN Resolution 1514 (XV), the "Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples", is implemented in the case of East Timor.

Mr Chairman,

Our mission to Lisbon took place at a time when the Portuguese President and Government were giving further proof of their commitment to East Timor's inalienable right to self-determination. We were able to witness for ourselves the depth and strength of this commitment.

President Mario Soares told us that the Indonesian Government had been trying for years to force Portugal to recognise its illegal integration of East Timor but, he said, as long as he remained President, Portugal would do no such a thing.

An example of Indonesia's attempts to twist and distort Portugal's highly principled stance towards East Timor occurred even as we were ourselves being made aware of the strength of Portugal's commitment. I refer to a report in **Kompas**, a leading Jakarta newspaper, on 24 June this year, which alleged that President Soares had told its correspondent that "the Portuguese Government no longer claims the territory of East Timor which is now part of Indonesia".

No-one with even the most basic knowledge of Portugal's stand since 1975 could possibly claim that any Portuguese Government since that time has had any territorial claims towards East Timor. Indeed, as Deputy Foreign Minister, Dr Durao Barrosa, was at pains to stress during our discussion with him, his country's efforts regarding East Timor are directed not at winning support for Portugal. "East Timor," he told us, "is not a Portuguese problem, it is an international problem".

The Portuguese Constitution makes it perfectly clear that Portugal is constitutionally bound "to promote and guarantee the independence of East Timor", a fact which the **Kompas** correspondent shamelessly concealed in his report. The English-language **Jakarta Post** went even further in distorting the portrayal of the Portuguese President's stand by claiming that "Soares said his country had dropped its claim to East Timor because the region (has) become Indonesia's 27th province".

The distortion was further compounded by no less a figure than Mr Kharis Suhud, the chairman of the Indonesian Parliament, who even had the effrontery to accuse the Portuguese President of lying. He did not believe, he said, that Portugal "had dropped its claim to East Timor". [**Jakarta Post**, 25 June 1988] I find it quite appalling that the most senior member of Indonesia's Parliament could lend his name to such blatant subterfuge.

I believe that we do not need to look far for an explanation for all this. The fact is that Indonesia is extremely worried by Lisbon's diplomatic offensive on East Timor's behalf. During our discussions in Lisbon, we were left in no doubt that the President, the Government and Parliament are more united today than ever on the need for such an offensive.

Both the President and the Prime Minister of Portugal have publicly re-affirmed their stand on East Timor while visiting ASEAN countries, the Prime Minister during a visit to Bangkok last year and the President during a visit to Manila in June. The significance of such bold affirmations of Portugal's position, pronounced in the capitals of some of Indonesia's closest allies, will surely not be lost on this Committee.

Then in May this year, at a joint meeting of Foreign Ministers of the EEC and ASEAN member states in Dusseldorf, the Portuguese Government convinced its eleven partners in the European Community to adopt a common stand on East Timor. Significantly, this happened in the presence of all the ASEAN Foreign Ministers. It is very important that the twelve EEC member-states will support Portugal at the forthcoming General Assembly even though, as is well known, most of these states have close commercial ties with Indonesia.

We met representatives of the six political parties in the Portuguese Parliament and were profoundly impressed by the unanimity and consensus of all shades of political opinion in Portugal on the question of independence for East Timor. We very much look forward to welcoming soon a number of Portuguese Parliamentarians in our new organisation, and we shall be working closely with them to impress upon our governments the righteousness of East Timor's cause.

Mr Chairman,

During our stay in Lisbon, we learnt of the proposal made in Jakarta by Mario Carrascalao, Indonesia's appointee as governor of its "27th province", that East Timor be opened up. Well, now, what better authority do we need that, after nearly thirteen years of "integration", the Indonesian Government still cannot allow free access into that tiny half of an island, even for Indonesians. And let there be no mistake. Governor Carrascalao was not proposing that East Timor be "opened up" to foreigners. God forbid! He was concerned, as he made clear in a number of statements to the press, that the East Timorese are getting an extremely raw deal at the receiving end of Indonesia's much-vaunted development programme. It turns out that what he wanted was that some bona fides Indonesian investors would put money into the territory, so as to create jobs for the Timorese. He also hopes for a freer flow of goods into East Timor where market prices are much higher than

anywhere in Indonesia.

Many senior government ministers, we are told, responded positively to Carrascalao's proposal, but not without a sting in the tail. Take the response of Foreign Minister Ali Alatas. Mr Alatas has made it plain on many occasions that foreign visitors wishing to visit East Timor in order to carry out investigations into allegations of human rights abuses will not be welcome. In response to the Carrascalao idea, he used another ploy, claiming that, and I quote,

> "some physical amenities are still lacking, so if journalists would like to travel, they must take into consideration that there are difficulties in transporation. That's why we have always been asking for understanding, that it is not so much a policy but it is physical constraints that sometimes forces us to be a little bit more selective." [**Jakarta Post**, 24 June 1988]

Does he mean that "transportation difficulties" will only be conjured up for those wanting to investigate human rights abuses?

But the responses from General Rudini, Minister of the Interior, and General Murdani, Minister of Defence and Security were the most telling. Both Ministers said that while they had no objection to opening up East Timor, everything depended on the security situation. Indeed, General Murdani warned Carrascalao that "his ministry and the armed forces would not be responsible for the possible negative impacts from the opening". [**Jakarta Post**, 28 June 1988] That undisguised threat neatly put a stop to all Mr Carrascalao's good intentions.

I think we should be grateful to Mr Carrascalao for speaking out publicly about opening up East Timor. While it will change nothing for the Timorese, it has brought into the open some of the problems confronted by the long-suffering inhabitants of Indonesia's colony. It has also proved, yet again, that security is the only criterion for policy decisions regarding East Timor. In other words, with all the means of modern warfare at their disposal, pitted against a resistance movement that is totally isolated from the outside world, Indonesia still faces widespread opposition to its presence in East Timor. This is of profound importance to the deliberations of your Committee.

Mr Chairman,

We also held discussions with leaders of the Fretilin and UDT parties, now working together in the National Convergence, and saw evidence of the close collaboration between the two parties during our visits to the refugee centres. We attach considerable importance to the fact that the Portuguese

Government and Parliament are consulting the Convergence on matters of importance, such as the Portuguese Parliament's response to an invitation from the Indonesian Parliament to visit East Timor.

During our stay in Lisbon, we spent the best part of two days with the East Timorese community, visiting four refugee centres. We decided to hold consultations with East Timorese refugees as a second-best option, because the Indonesian authorities still refuse to permit any investigations in East Timor itself. We had further confirmation of this from a statement made in response to a press report about our mission by Mr Theo Sambuaga, a member of the Commission on Foreign Affairs of the Indonesian Parliament. He first described our trip to Lisbon as an "unfriendly" act. He went on:

> "If they want to observe the current situation in East Timor objectively, please come to Indonesia because it is open to anyone wishing to observe the current situation in East Timor. But we refuse anyone desiring to go to East Timor for fact-finding because that means they will interfere in our internal affairs." [**Jakarta Post**, 18 July 1988]

Mr Chairman.

The testimony we heard from these refugees drew our attention to a number of problems:

Firstly, human rights abuses continue unabated. We were told of the existence of many places of detention in addition to those officially acknowledged by the authorities and to which the International Committee of the Red Cross has access. We were told that local military commands in Dili and throughout the country have their own detention cells. We heard even that prisoners are held in the private homes of army officers, where rooms have been converted into cells. This conceals the existence of detainees and makes it possible for the authorities to claim, as they are now doing, that there are only eleven political detainees still being held in Dili.

We received detailed testimony from a Timorese refugee, Mr Cristiano Costa, about his own appalling experiences during political detention that lasted for twenty months to April 1985. His account is attached to this * petition. For the record, may I remind this Committee that in March 1985, a month before Mr Costa's release, the UN Commission on Human Rights agreed to delete East Timor from examination under its 1503 confidential procedure, having been convinced by Indonesia that the human rights situation there did not warrant further investigation. Mr Costa's release did not signal any improvement at all. On the contrary, it was, he testifies, a cover-up for hundreds of political trials that were stage-managed to convict people who had been forced to sign false documents incriminating each other.

We heard of the experiences of families which had refused the option of Indonesian citizenship, preferring to opt for Portuguese citizenship and with it, the hope of leaving their homeland which had become an unbearable place to live in under a foreign power.

The younger refugees who spoke to us told us of the system of education in Indonesian schools where all knowledge of East Timor's history and culture has been erased, in favour of Indonesian history and culture, a typical characteristic of colonial brain-washing of the younger generation.

We heard terrifying allegations of the systematic poisoning of dozens of children in a hospital in Dili in the early part of 1986. Our mission probed these allegations at some length because of the seriousness of the charges. According to the refugees, the person who discovered that poisoned medicines were being administered was an Indonesian doctor whose alertness put a stop to further deaths. Although many of the refugees firmly believed the allegations to be true, we felt we could not endorse them, as the refugees were unable to answer several technical questions. We did feel, however, that this was a case requiring thorough investigation. But this can only take place free from Indonesian control.

We heard in particular of the conditions under which foreign journalists and diplomats are allowed to visit East Timor. They are escorted and followed by security agents, and their conversations with Timorese are monitored. Even taxi drivers used by them are interrogated afterwards by the army. Our many questions about the circumstances under which foreigners visit East Timor convinced us that any team wishing to visit the country for the purposes of investigation would have to insist on the most rigorous safeguards to make it possible for Timorese to divulge information without fear of reprisals. It was made very clear to us that foreign diplomats and journalists who visit under the circumstances permitted by the authorities at present cannot obtain any idea of everyday life in East Timor.

Mr Chairman,

The experiences of our Mission to Lisbon convinced all three of us that the international community must not abandon the people of East Timor in their just struggle for self-determination. It is our fervent wish that the UN will take positive steps this year to bring to an end the years of suffering of the East Timorese and start the process of genuine decolonisation as defined in Resolution 1514 (XV).

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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* available on request from: Diana Quick (212) 682 2745